

Large Home of John J. Taylor was Fairbury Hospital

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The first Fairbury hospital was started in 1911 by two nurses who were classmates at the Sanitarium Training School in Hinsdale, Illinois. These two nurses were Rachel Olson and Anna Martha Gadeken Vetter. The progression of the Fairbury hospitals' locations was the Archer House on Locust Street, a house at the northwest corner of the intersection of First Street and Route 24, a block house just east of what is now Circle K gas station, the J.J. Taylor large house on South Fifth Street, and the brick hospital at South Fifth.

In 1928, the hospital's location changed from the block house by Circle K to a large old house built by John J. Taylor at South Fifth Street. His home served as the Fairbury Hospital until November 1953, when the brick hospital was completed on South Fifth Street. The old Taylor house, built in 1868, was likely torn down a few years after the brick hospital's opening in 1953.

The story of the Taylor family began with the birth of John J. Taylor in 1818 in Milton, New York. He was the son of George W. Taylor (1796-1879) and Mary H. L. Dupersoy (1790-1837). George and Mary Taylor had three children.

Unfortunately, Mary Taylor died in 1837 at the age of 46. Her son, John J. Taylor, was 18 years of age when his mother died. His father, George W. Taylor, then married Cynthia Wood (1804-1877). George and Cynthia Taylor had four children. Two of these children were William H. Taylor (1840-1925) and Procter Taylor (1844-1926). Many years later, in 1886, John J. Taylor and his two half-brothers became business partners, and they created the firm Taylor Bros. & Co. in Quincy, Ill. This company operated a wheat grinding mill.

In 1853, John J. Taylor, at the age of 35, completed his first land purchase transaction in Livingston County. Between 1853 and 1858, John J. Taylor made 26 land purchase transactions and bought a total of 2,240 acres in Livingston County. In 1850, Congress passed a new law awarding free land to veterans of past wars. Many of these veterans elected to sell their land rights instead of moving to the swampy lands in Central Illinois. The official land price in the 1850s was \$2.50 per acre to buy the land from the federal government. The military veterans sold their rights for about 30 cents an acre, or about 12 cents on the dollar of the government price. John J. Taylor used these military land patents for every one of his 26 land purchase transactions.

John J. Taylor grew up in Brunswick, Maine. In 1855, he married Miss Hannah Elizabeth Carey in Maine. John was 36, and Hannah was 27 when they married. John and Hannah Taylor had three children.

John J. Taylor and Hannah E. Carey were second cousins because they shared the same great-grandparents of Captain Jonathan Carey (1717-1801) and Elizabeth Procter (1724-1803). Their grandparents were not the same.

Also, in 1855, John J. Taylor published an article in the Livingston County News newspaper. In the article, Mr. Taylor reported that he had made a profit on his wheat crop in Livingston County after he had paid all his expenses. Unfortunately, due to bad weather in the years after he published this article, local wheat farmers lost money trying to grow wheat.

John J. Taylor initially lived in Pontiac before he built his large home on South Fifth Street in Fairbury in 1868. In the 1860 Census, he was living in Pontiac. In the 1870 Census, he listed his occupation as a banker and was residing in Fairbury. Mr. Taylor listed his net worth as \$60,000 in 1870. This net worth would equal \$1.47 million in today's dollars.

On April 2, 1872, the First National Bank was organized in Fairbury. Mr. I. P. McDowell was President, John J. Taylor was Vice-President, and T. S. O. McDowell was the Cashier. Mr. Taylor remained the Vice-President of this bank until about 1894.

Most of Livingston County's land was swampland and unsuitable for growing grain crops. In the late 1870s, farmers began experimenting with draining the farmland using clay field tiles. In the 1880s, most of the farmland in Livingston County was tiled. Once the land was tiled, it became some of the most productive farmland on the planet.

Field tile was in such great demand that two large tile factories were set up in the Fairbury area. Mr. Rufus C. Straight owned one large tile factory, which was located where the Dos Fuentes Mexican restaurant is on Route 24 on the west side of Fairbury. Mr. James W. McDowell operated another large tile factory north of Fairbury in Section 22 of Avoca Township.

John J. Taylor was one of the early adopters of draining swampy land using clay tiles. He wrote several articles documenting his success using clay tiles. One of his first articles was published in the Pontiac Sentinel newspaper on July 28, 1880. Another was published in the 1883 Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the State of Illinois.

In these articles, John J. Taylor gave specific examples of the advantages of tiling, including increases in crop yields he experienced after tiling his fields.

In January of 1886, the firm of Taylor Bros. & Co. was created. This firm owned and operated a wheat grinding mill in Quincy, Illinois. The three partners were John J. Taylor, his half-brother William H. Taylor, and his half-brother Procter Taylor.

In 1890, John J. Taylor, 72, was a very successful farmer, banker, and businessman. He donated \$1,000 to build an observatory at Bowdoin College, a private liberal arts college

in Brunswick, Maine. This donation would be equivalent to \$34,500 in today's dollars. The observatory still stands and is being refurbished, with a completion date in 2025.

In 1894, John J. Taylor was 76 years old. Evidence from that period suggests that he started to experience some mental issues associated with aging. In 1894, Mr. Taylor ended his long tenure as bank vice president. His partnership with his two half-brothers in the Quincy milling business was forced into financial receivership.

In that era, the milling business needed \$25,000, and John J. Taylor agreed to furnish the necessary funds. Instead of providing the firm with the funds, Mr. Taylor commenced to transfer his real estate holdings to his daughter and her husband, who was an attorney. His partners believed John J. Taylor's actions were the results of temporary insanity. To protect the firm, the two half-brothers appealed to a local court for protection. The court appointed the mill manager, Seymour J. Carter, to receive and take legal possession of the mill. All of the creditors were paid, and the business continued to operate successfully.

According to his obituary, John J. Taylor was never the same after 1894. For the last three years of his life, he refused to leave his large home on South Fifth Street and would not see any visitors. Many of his friends wanted to stop and visit with him, but they could not do so.

In 1897, John J. Taylor died at the age of 79. His obituary noted that he was once the head of Fairbury's Taylor & Weaver real estate and loan firm. In addition to owning stock in the First National Bank in Fairbury, he also owned stock in several banks in the Chicago area. Mr. Taylor was buried in Graceland Cemetery.

Four years later, in 1901, Hannah Taylor died at the age of 73. She was buried with her husband in Graceland Cemetery.

James C. Taylor, son of John and Hannah Taylor, continued to live in the large home on South Fifth Street after his parent's death. James never married. In the 1910 Census, Frieda Munz (1872-1927) lived with James Taylor and was the housekeeper. Frieda Munz (1872-1927) was the daughter of Conrad Munz Sr. (1841-1931) and Catherine Blumier (1849-1926).

In 1923, James C. Taylor died at the age of 58, and he was still living in the large family home on South Fifth Street. His obituary noted that James was one of the largest landowners in the Fairbury area.

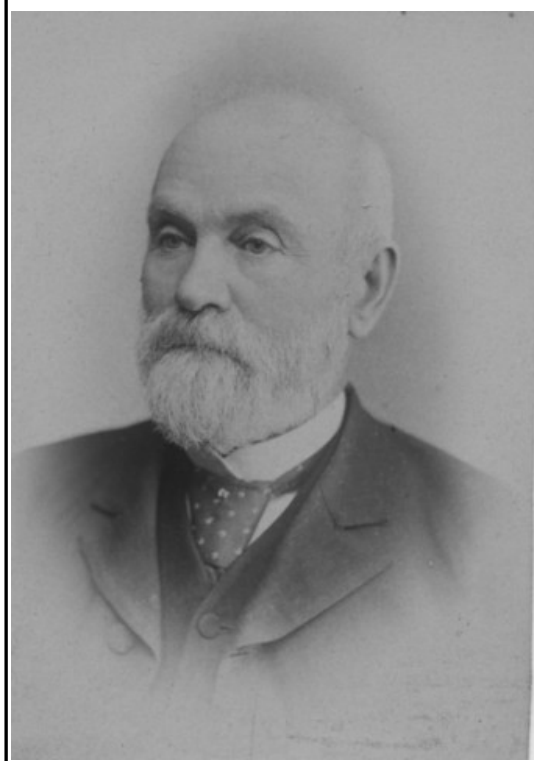
When he died, James C. Taylor apparently left the large Taylor family house to his housekeeper, Frieda Munz. In 1925, Frieda married Samuel H. Scharlach (1858-1930). Samuel was 66, and she was 52 when they got married. Two years later, Frieda Scharlach died at the age of 54.

In 1928, local community leaders decided that Fairbury needed a larger hospital. On January 29, 1928, the Hospital Board bought the large Taylor house on South Fifth Street from the estate of Frieda Munz Scharlach for \$6,155. Local volunteers helped to remodel this large, rambling house into a hospital. The volunteers converted the residence into a ten-bed hospital with a large kitchen, a nursery, a dumb waiter, an elevator, and a reception office. They added to the house, giving the hospital an operating room. On August 17, 1929, the public was invited to view the new hospital. Fairbury residents were pleased with the accomplishments.

The large Taylor house was torn down once the new brick hospital was completed in 1953. John J. Taylor was a wealthy farmer, banker, and businessman in Fairbury for over three decades.



A February 1946 photo looking northeast at the home of John J. Taylor that served as the Fairbury Hospital location from 1929 until 1953. The large house on South Fifth Street was built in 1868 and was torn down around 1953. Note the walkway connecting the house to the new brick obstetrics building.



John J. Taylor



Hannah Taylor

